

Peopling: Wise Love
Glen Elliott - August 20, 2017

Series Big Idea: The Bible is clear that there are different kinds of people and we need to respond to each kind of person in a different way. There is no “one size fits all” way to engage with people. There are some people who outright reject the truth and are intent on hurting us. There are some people who refuse to deal with truth and reality. Then there are the wise who listen to the truth and allow God’s wisdom to transform how they live. In this series we’ll look at each kind of person and figure out how to do “peopling” well with different people types. The Bible and especially the book of Proverbs gives us wisdom on how to learn to people well.

Message Big Idea: Wise people own their own problems and listen to wisdom to get help to become better and wiser. Fools try to put their problems on you so you’ll own their problem. Wise love sets boundaries to insure that the real owner of the problem has to deal with the problem. The Bible teaches us to be responsible TO others to provide appropriate help while remembering that we are responsible FOR ourselves. Love helps another person with a burden that’s too heavy for them to bear. But it doesn’t try to take on the daily responsibilities of life or what the Bible calls the “load.” It is all about proper ownership. Who owns the problem? Wise love will set a boundary while still loving a foolish person.

Main Idea: Wise love sets boundaries with a foolish person.

Main Text: Gal. 6:2-5

Supporting texts: Matthew 7:13-14; Proverbs 3:7; 18:2; 19:19

Reflection/Discussion Questions:

1. Do you have trouble saying “no” in general or in specific situations or with certain people? Do you know people who struggle to set healthy boundaries? Why do many of us struggle with saying “no” and setting limits and boundaries?
2. Did Jesus set boundaries for himself? Can you think of times when Jesus said “no” (in one form or another) and set limits and gave people consequences? Would you consider Jesus good at setting boundaries?
3. How do you see God setting boundaries for us in the Bible? Can you identify a few spiritual boundaries found in the Bible? Why has God set boundaries and what is their purpose?
4. Why is it necessary to set boundaries with foolish people? What is the purpose of boundaries? What might these boundaries look like?
5. Who do you have difficulty setting boundaries with and why?

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Message:

Do you have trouble saying “no?” Do you find yourself saying “yes” when you know deep down that “no” was the better answer for you and/or the other person? When you try to say “no,” do you find yourself giving lots of reasons to support or justify the reason you said no? Can people, at times, manipulate you into doing something you don’t want to do or to buy what you don’t want to buy? Are there certain people that seem to run your life? Do you feel guilty when you say “no?” Why do we have trouble saying “No!?” Sometimes we are tempted to try and please people. We want to be liked. We don’t want to face rejection or anger...and more.

But the ability to say “no” is often part of good peopling. Good peopling requires that we learn to say no at times, especially to evil and foolish kinds of people. We are in our third week of a series called *Peopling*. You saw in the opening video that we are looking at three kinds of people - evil, foolish and wise and how to best respond to each type. Each type responds differently to truth so we have to deal with each differently. Today we are going to focus on the way the Bible teaches us to respond to fools. The best way to help a fool is to quit talking, because they are not listening. And then set a boundary to help them face reality and the consequences of their foolish decisions and actions. So let’s explore this idea of boundaries.

The Bible is a book all about boundaries. God is a God of boundaries. God has given us rules and principles to live by - they are spiritual boundaries. The Bible opens with two humans violating the boundaries God set. Adam and Eve had the run a place called Paradise, except for one tree in the middle of the garden that was out of bounds and off limits. But they crossed the boundary to their peril, and to our peril. Sin entered the world and along with it untold suffering.

Jesus taught us about spiritual boundaries. God gave us freedom to choose. We can choose to follow Jesus or follow any other way we want. But each choice comes with a consequence. Listen to Jesus’ words in **Matthew 7:13-14 (pg. 458 - NIV)** - ¹³ ***“Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. ¹⁴ But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.*** God created us so we could love and that meant he had to give us the ability to choose - we call that free will. It is our choice which gate we go through - God’s gate or the world’s super highway. But we can’t change the result or the consequence of the choice. Jesus is saying - you are free to choose but choose wisely! Choose the way with clear and narrow boundaries and have life. Or choose the way with wide boundaries and face destruction. We get to choose: God’s way or our way. Heaven or hell. We can be wise or foolish in our choice, but the consequences will follow.

Foolish people are those who don’t want to live by God’s wise ways and rules. You have them in your life. We all do. I do. They want to live life the way they want to live

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and they won't listen to reason about a better or wiser way. Listen to **Proverbs 3:7 (pg. 297 - NIV) - *Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and shun evil.*** Fools are wise in their own eyes. They believe something to be true or real which is not, but they don't see it. The wise fear the Lord which means they respect and love God's truth and trust God's ways and boundaries. The wise also shun evil and evil people. There you actually have the three types of people that you saw in the intro video - evil, foolish and wise. Remember, our focus isn't to label and judge people and that's it. The reason we want to be able to identify them is to be able to know how to make a wise response to each.

Last week we focused on being wise and becoming wiser. Today our focus is on how to best respond to a fool. A fool is described well in **Proverbs 18:2 (pg. 304 - NIV) - *Fools find no pleasure in understanding but delight in airing their own opinions.*** They've got it all figured out and don't need to listen to you. So how do you respond to a foolish person if they won't listen? You stop trying to reason with them and set limits and consequences. That means we set boundaries with a foolish type of person. How do you do good peopling with a fool? How do you love a fool? That's my point and focus today - **Wise love sets boundaries with a foolish person.**

A lot of us can identify with the story I am going to share. Many of us can put a name we know in place of the person in this story. I know a man who had a drug problem. He went to jail and prison a number of times for drugs and other crimes related to his drug use. His father was a police officer and through his connections, would find a way to get him released...time after time. His parents desperately wanted to help and they bailed him out every time he asked for help. Later, he counted that his parents and other people tried to help him 31 specific times. He ended up in jail again in Houston. He asked his parents for money and help...again. How do you respond to a fool like Blake?

Here's what the book of Proverbs says about that. Let's read **Proverbs 19:19 (pg. 304 - NIV) - *A hot-tempered person must pay the penalty; rescue them, and you will have to do it again.*** Hot-tempered is another name, a parallel name for a fool in the Proverbs. The way to respond to them is to set limits and let them face the consequences or pay the penalty. But what a foolish person wants is for you to rescue them, just like Blake who was in jail time after time. And then there is no end to the rescuing, until we decide not to rescue them. The rescuing doesn't help them. It is not a wise way to love someone.

Blake got a response from his mother. She sent him a short letter and it said "*Blake, Maybe you need more time in jail.*" He sat in jail, looking at that note and knew that his parents were not going to bail him out this time. They were done rescuing him. The truth finally sunk in. Blake told himself: "You are here because you put yourself here." That was the catalyst to help him decide he had to take responsibility for his problem. When he got out, he got into AA and got a sponsor and become sober and later started helping others with their addictions.

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What I'm describing is what is so characteristic of a foolish type of person. Foolish people don't want to deal with reality and they are great at making excuses and blaming others for their problems. Foolish people are experts at trying to shift the responsibility of their behavior onto others like you. They want you to fix their problems. They want their problems to become your problems. Foolish people want others to rescue them.

That's what Blake wanted. It was so hard for his mother to write and say "no!" It feels so mean and so unloving. And a fool will make sure you feel bad for saying "no." But the fact is that it can be the most loving thing you can do. Love wants the best and the best thing for anyone is that they own their problem. Once they own it is their problem, then we can help them.

As Christians, we often think that good peopling means we just need to love others. My definition of love is this - love wants the best for others. This must be our heart desire for all people - regardless of what type of person they are: evil, foolish or wise. But HOW you love depends on WHO you are loving. Remember our key principle for good peopling: **How a person reacts to truth determines how you respond.** How do you best love an evil person? Don't engage, protect yourself and pray like crazy for them. I'm not joking. Jesus said in Matthew 5:44 we are to love enemies & pray for them. I can't tell you how many stories I've heard of evil people who were saved and transformed by their grandmas who prayed their evil kids and grandkids into faith! How do you love a wise person? Speak the truth in love. How do you love a fool? Stop talking and set limits and consequences which we call boundaries. **Wise love sets boundaries with a foolish person.**

But many Christians get confused at this point. We have those difficult people in our lives and we are taught over and over that as a true follower of Jesus, we are to love everyone, right? You've heard what has become a Christian proverb - love has no limits. Is that true? Is that always true? Is that wise love? Love at times says "no!" Sometimes, the most loving we do can do is to say no. It's past your kids bedtime, they've brushed their teeth and they are prone to be hyperactive when they eat candy. But that kid you love so much says; "Can I PLEASE have one more piece of candy?" Love says "NO!" Your student asks if they can get a hotel room with their friends for an overnigher after prom night. Love says "No!" What good can come out of that?!

Now, 1 Corinthians 13:8, part of what we call the "love chapter" says - "***Love never fails.***" That is absolutely right! Wise love never fails to be the best response. But that verse does not say love doesn't set limits! Love does set limits when that is truly what is best for a person.

So with a fool we stop talking and stop trying to reason with them. We stop making empty threats. We employ the principle that God uses with fools and that we saw taught in Proverbs 19:19. We set limits and consequences. We set boundaries. **Wise love sets boundaries with a foolish person.**

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And this principle is not just theory for me. Here's how it played out for me and my wife. When our daughter was a freshman in high school, we discovered she was using drugs. We were devastated. After we got through the initial shock, self-blame and guilt, we were able to support her & help her get into an AA type program modified for teens. It took a while for her to get sober, but after she was, we set down one key rule in our house. She was welcome to live with us but there were to be no drugs in the house and no drugs in her or on her. That was the limit we set. Yes, I wanted to add a hundred other rules, but at that time, that was the one rule that really mattered. The consequences were that if we found drugs or she was using, she could not live in our house. We set the boundary and clearly communicated it to her and she agreed. We did that because we loved her. But to be honest, we wondered if that time came if we could really follow through. Well, we were tested.

One Sunday night my wife and I were talking and we realized that all the signs of her using drugs were back. By the way, if you are observant, you don't have to do a drug test to see if someone is using - the signs are usually very clear. The next day all three of us sat down at the kitchen table and talked. She admitted to using and then I asked her for the keys to the car and house. I handed her the phone to find a place to live.

And yes, I was cool and calm on the outside but I was totally wrecked on the inside. Do you know how hard it is to watch your daughter walk out the front door? We were so aware of the risk. She might make a really bad choice as to where to go or who to connect with. She might go to her druggie friends. So I gave her some suggestions of who to call, but she had to make the call. Everything we did was motivated by our love for her, even if she didn't see that. I loved her so much I wanted to set a boundary to help her get and stay sober.

She ended up making a good choice and found a place with a family also in recovery in Phoenix. We had to set a boundary with clear consequences. We had to enforce the boundary, as hard as it was. It was the step of wise love that ultimately got her to a better place. **Wise love sets boundaries with a foolish person.**

This is what the Bible teaches. The Bible shows us how we are love in a wise way and how to people well. One of the clear teachings is found in **Galatians 6:5 (pg. 548 - NIV)** - ***⁵ for each one should carry their own load.*** This is a principle found throughout the Bible. The word used here is "load." It describes a kind of burden or "load" that can and must be carried by an individual. It is more like a backpack that we use to carry our own cargo. The cargo in the backpack might in fact be heavy and uncomfortable, but is our own load. It is cargo that belongs to me that I must carry and can't ultimately give it to another.

For example, no one can take the load of my own pride. I have to deal with my pride. No one can take my load of bad decision making. I need to take responsibility for making better decisions. There are just things for which I'm responsible.

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But here's where foolish people have a problem. They have a load like we all do. But they don't want to own their load or problem. They want to give the backpack to you. You have to decide. Will I take a fool's load or will I choose wise love. **Wise love sets boundaries with a foolish person.** But that is not all of the teaching about this.

There's another important part to this. I intentionally skipped over it to come back to it. Look at **Galatians 6:2 (pg. 548 - NIV) - ²Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.** We are to carry each other's burdens. The word burden refers to something that is very heavy like this huge boulder. It describes something that is so excessively heavy that a person can't carry it by themselves. It describes a burden or problem too heavy to bear, one that can crush you if you try by yourself. It means you are not strong enough, don't have enough resources like time, money, skill or knowledge to handle the situation. The law of Christ, which is to love others, tells us to help them carry the weight. Love helps a person with a big problem without owning the problem.

Now let me connect the load and boulder idea with a normal everyday illustration. This is actually my story as a freshman in high school. You know there was this thing called "new math." It's back by the way. Almost every night I had algebra homework. That was my LOAD. No one should do my homework for me. But I really don't understand the principles so my homework has become a BURDEN that I can't bear by myself. My father, a math genius, can help me understand the principle so I can do the homework. My father can help me with my burden without talking what is my load.

Here's what this all means. As a wise person, I have to own my own load. If I have a burden and need help, I ask for help, but I don't give my load away. A wise person also refuses to let a foolish person trick them into carrying the load! If the foolish person owns the load or problem, then we are more than willing to help with the burden. **Wise love sets boundaries with a foolish person.**

Parents, learn the principles and practical ways to set healthy boundaries for your kids or teens and help them learn to be wise. We offer a course called Love and Logic that teaches the principles of setting good boundaries. The principles apply not only to your children, but to anyone. We have two classes starting at the beginning of September on Sundays at 12:45pm and Wednesdays at 6:30pm. Go to "Connect" at the top of our website and then go to "classes" and sign up or go to Launching Point.

So, who do you know that is acting like a fool? Maybe it's you?! Who do you love that is being irresponsible? Who do you know who keeps making excuses or blames others for their problems? Who do you know that just refuses to listen? We all have those people in our lives. So learn to love people well with foolish people. Decide to love in a wise way. Decide to set good healthy, and reasonable boundaries.

And the first time you set a boundary, that may be your burden and you'll most likely need help. My wife and I needed help when we set our boundary with our daughter. We

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could not have gotten to that point without wise counsel. Seek counsel from trusted wise friends.

And finally, there is a tremendous book written by two Christian counselors to help you. They've sold several million copies. I keep having to order them because I give them away all the time. The book is *Boundaries - When to Say Yes and How to Say No to Take Control of Your Life* by Henry Cloud and John Townsend. We have some copies out at Guest Services for purchase. I highly recommend it if you are having trouble setting boundaries.

Dealing with a foolish person and setting boundaries is hard. I know from experience. And I've talked with at least a dozen of you over the last two weeks who are facing this very issue. I've seen the pain inside and the tears outside. This is really hard. As wise people, we need help. This is one of the main reasons why we need to have a good spiritual community around us - a group that can guide us, help us and encourage us when we do have to set boundaries. We need God's wisdom. We need the wisdom of others. We need help. So let's ask for that help.

Prayer: There are foolish people in our lives who are making bad decisions and not listening to you or to us. They are headed down a terrible path. God help us to be wise in how we respond. God we need your help. Guide us to be wise. Give us courage to set boundaries that we need. Let our wise love help that person begin to make wise decisions. In Jesus Name!